

Award Winning Sales Engagement Practices

How do you know you have successful sales engagement between partners? If you were to ask a sales rep, how do work with a partner, and the response is: “I work with Jane Doe at Partner Company. We are jointly working five accounts in the pipeline. We have an edge in these accounts because our alliance provides a stronger ROI and faster time to market than the competition,” well, then you’ve arrived! But how often as alliance managers do we hear this? Successful joint selling is probably the Holy Grail of go-to-market partners.

Unisys Corporation was awarded Microsoft’s prestigious award in 2002 for Global Service Partner of the Year, recognizing superior field engagement process. Significantly, this recognition was awarded based upon input from the Microsoft field organization. How do two large, complex, and dispersed field organizations create a formula for successful joint selling?

Successful sales engagement requires a number of best practices and above all executive commitment and trust between the field organizations. Executive commitment takes many forms including allocating sufficient investment not only to corporate strategic alignment in the alliance, but also sufficient staff and funding to execute at the “feet on the street” level.

Unisys has invested heavily, but wisely to create a field organization to foster relationships at the district level, assigning a Unisys person to perform the role of Microsoft Relationship Executive (MRE) to each of Microsoft districts where they do business in the United States. Similarly, MRE staffing is assigned to subsidiaries in Europe, Latin America, and Asia/Pacific. The model was designed and implemented over the past three years.

The payoff? The pipeline for Microsoft related products and services has grown 8X over 18 months while the related orders have grown more than 3X.

The role of Microsoft Relationship Executive

The mission of the MRE is to facilitate joint selling by evangelizing the Unisys portfolio to everyone in the local Microsoft organization. But before that can happen effectively, the MRE must build mindshare and trust with the Microsoft sales reps in each region. The MREs are intimately involved with every phase of the sales cycle, but their long-range goal is to build relationships and grow business with Microsoft. This is often very difficult in a field position since the excitement is around doing the deal, but by focusing on the longer-range goal greater revenue and return on investment is ultimately realized.

MRE’s support market development through regionally targeted, joint marketing initiatives. They are invested with budget and resources to drive awareness and lead generation activities into industry sectors that are relevant to their specific region; for example, in New York the



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focus may be the financial market. These efforts are also supported by the local field organizations, which must demonstrate an ability to collaborate effectively with the partner before any money is invested in joint marketing.

Organizational considerations

While MRE's are essentially business development and marketing roles, they report into the sales organization. This has been a very effective management decision. By being part of the sales organization, they are viewed and supported as sales resource and are included in all key sales decisions related to Microsoft.

Unisys has recognized that effective alliance management is more than just assigning relationship management. It takes substantial, cross-functional teams to execute. Each region has a delivery organization with competencies in Microsoft technologies.

Incentives

Unisys employs incentives not only to encourage 'right action' for MRE's but also for the field sales. MRE performance is measured based upon the level of joint activity that occurs between Microsoft and Unisys. This keeps them focused on achieving market development goals.

Reporting partner activity and joint selling has traditionally been the Achilles' heel for most companies trying to assess the degree of leverage and sales assistance driven by key alliances. Unisys Field Sales is incented to register all opportunities involving Microsoft. If opportunities are not registered, marketing funds and alliance resources cannot be allocated to those sales engagements. This provides the carrot to induce Unisys field sales to be vigilant in their reporting.

Institutionalizing Best Practices

The Microsoft field engagement model was initially developed and honed in the U.S. As it has proven successful, it has been exported to Europe, Latin America, and Asia/Pacific. It is now the model for all company alliances and is truly reflective of a world-class and worldwide field engagement model.

Long term, strategic view

Executive commitment and support, as always, is key to alliance success. While it is easy to support an alliance that generates a significant percentage of company value, the real test is the resolve and consistency it takes to maintain investment while that alliance is ramping. Successful alliances are a long-term strategic investment, which can be highly rewarding. The Unisys and Microsoft alliance has been the outcome of many years of steady, visionary commitment.

"Manage Strategically, Engage Tactically"

Chuck Curtis, Dir of Corporate Alliances, Unisys